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Congress of the United States
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March 24th, 2017

The Honorable James Mattis
Secretary of Defense
1000 Defense Pentagon
Washington, D.C. 20301

Dear Secretary Mattis,


We are writing you today to seek your support for maintaining the moratorium on oil and gas leasing activities in the Gulf of Mexico, as established by the Gulf of Mexico Energy Security Act (GOMESA) of 2006. The moratorium allows for the maintenance of the Joint Gulf Range Complex, a unique training and testing area critical to our military readiness and national security.

As you know, the law restricts leasing and pre-leasing activities in the portion of the Eastern Planning Area within 125 miles of Florida, the portion of the Central Planning Area within 100 miles of Florida, and all areas of the Gulf of Mexico east of the Military Mission Line (86 degrees, 41 minutes west longitude) through June 30, 2022. This enables the use of a 180,000 square-mile overwater test and training range without above-surface interference.

The Joint Gulf Range Complex is used for high-altitude, supersonic air combat training for frontline fighters like the F-22 and the F-35, live-fire air-to-air and air-to-ground training, air-to-air missile testing, electronic warfare, drone targeting, and Naval sub-surface, air-to-surface and surface-to-surface testing, including mine and counter-mine operations. This vast range allows for hypersonic weapons testing and space launch. The 325th Fighter Wing and the 53rd Weapons Evaluation Group at Tyndall AFB, the 96th Test Wing, 53rd Wing and the 33rd Fighter Wing at Eglin AFB, and Special Operations Command at Hurlburt Field make extensive use of these overwater training areas. The range allows for seamless transition between overwater to overland activities. There is no comparable area near an established base with instrumentation infrastructure that can support advanced testing and joint training exercises. New investments approved by Congress will continue to enhance the Joint Gulf Range Complex and make this asset even more valuable.

Allowing oil and gas leasing activities in the areas under moratoria will create insurmountable risks to civilian and military personnel, military assets, and drilling infrastructure. We fear that combat training and advanced test and evaluation missions would be unable to continue if the moratorium was lifted. Prior military leaders have described the Joint Gulf Range Complex as a "national treasure." Consequently, we respectfully seek your support for maintaining the moratorium beyond 2022 and the incomparable national asset we have in the Joint Range Complex. We appreciate your consideration of this matter.

Sincerely,


Neal Dunn, M.D.
Member of Congress


Matt Gaetz
Member of Congress

Ted Studd F2.3

Ted Studd, DVM
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John H. Rutherford

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